PROBLEM BASED LEARNING

Gregory Jacobs

Christopher M. Parfitt

Karen Shaw

Mike Wexler

Florida Gulf Coast University

College of Education

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**Teacher leadership and taking risks**

Modern school improvement heavily depends on teacher leadership. Hickory High School desperately needs top quality teacher leaders. Principal Jim O’Connor needs to understand that top down styles fail to institute necessary reform. True leadership best occurs as an interaction between people in reciprocal roles. Empowering teacher leadership goes beyond a mere delegation of power and the principal must be mindful and foster teacher development. The principal must have confidence in his or her decisions for the teachers to fully participate (Helterbran, 2010). Likewise, the teachers must have an open and participatory relationship with their principal (Leech & Fulton, 2008). Jim O’Connor needs to nurture and establish open relations with all members of the staff, not just the older teachers.

Helterbran (2010) states that true teacher leadership come from within; it occurs when a teacher identifies a problem and actively works to solve the problem. The phenomenon cannot occur if the teacher does not recognize his or her own skill. The principal must help the teacher develop self-confidence and aspire to take charge of their professional development. The younger staff members who hold high ambitions and desires for promotion can rise to the occasion and take initiative to solve problems without receiving a mandate from the principal. Principal O’Connor can help younger teachers develop the confidence and hone their skills. Whether the principal or teacher leader, they must exemplify the behavior and commitment to the goals.

Identification of outdated and ineffective policies is crucial to allow teacher to take appropriate risks. The faculty at Hickory High School can maintain many of the great traditions while simultaneously updating policies and procedures to reflect the current research and best practices. The principal must have the vision to match the group’s capabilities to the tasks needed. Jim O’Connor must be at the forefront and effectively communicate a vision that all the staff can support. Effective communication skills are essential to conveying the vision to the staff (Leech & Fulton, 2008).

Often teachers have difficulty envisioning themselves as leaders in the school. Helterbran (2010) acknowledges the stereotypical isolation in the teaching professional. However, becoming a teacher leader requires breaking out of the stereotype. Otherwise teachers do not meaningfully recognize their contributions. The younger staff members are having difficulty envisioning roles as teacher leaders; Principal O’Connor must assist the younger staff members in breaking out of the stereotype.

There are few extrinsic rewards associated with teacher leadership and it can often result more work for a teacher; the principal must encourage and support teachers, especially in their professional development. Quality professional development will aid all of the staff at Hickory High School. Both the younger teachers and older teachers, along with Jim O’Connor can benefit from relevant professional development. Leech and Fulton (2008) believe that the principal must cultivate followers and their abilities; thus increasing commitment and loyalty. Rowe, Stewart, and Patterson (2007) liken the process to the theory of social capital; where both parties work together for mutual benefit and display a large sum of reciprocity and trust. Principal O’Connor needs to gain trust and build social capital.

**Developing Potential**

Overcoming obstruction is a difficult task, though a necessary one. Those most vehemently opposing change must be identified and every effort made to enlist their involvement. Should they still stand in the way, then those who are willing to lead must go over or around the obstructionists. An environment of optimism, hard-work, educational excellence and success are necessary to cultivate teacher leaders (Helterbran, 2010). The hostility of Hickory High School will only cease if Jim O’Connor is at the forefront creating the necessary environment. The principal must have plans in place to foster the development of teacher leaders (Helterbran, 2010; Leech & Fulton, 2008). Most importantly, teachers learn from each other; this phenomenon has to be recognized and encouraged. The school must be viewed as a place where teachers learn (Helterbran, 2010). The old staff believes that the new staff does not appreciate the heritage and history of Hickory High School, while the new staff believes that O’Connor and the old staff are a hindrance. Both sides need to learn from each other and Jim O’Connor is the key making sure that it occurs.

Continual learning allows school connectedness. Rowe, Stewart, and Patterson (2007) define connectedness as the level of cohesiveness between diverse groups. The cohesiveness extends beyond the connection between teachers, it relates to students, parents, community members, and other stakeholders. Hickory High School needs to establish connections with parents, community members, and students to truly be successful. Leech and Fulton (2008) assert that ownership and accountability must be distributed among members. Interaction will increase as will teacher satisfaction and commitment to the school and the profession. The more that Jim O’Connor can involve members of the staff; they will become more committed and professional. Rourke and Boone (2009) assert that when teacher leadership permeates a school and personal responsibility leads the way, the staff develop a sense of belonging and creates a culture where teachers want to lead. With hard work and leadership on the part of Principal O’Connor, he can create a positive school culture and a climate of responsibility and leadership.

**Assessing results**

When teacher have control over the curriculum, they are better able to align instructional strategies and positively impact students. Utilizing technology and data driven results allows for continual assessment and monitoring of progress (Rourke & Boone, 2009). When teachers take the risk and are able to incorporate new technology into the curriculum, the end result is a curriculum and program that appear very different from the beginning (Wehrli, 2009). Technology can be implemented gradually and it will allow an opportunity for teachers to learn together.

The use of new technology can be daunting for teachers. Wehrli (2009) believes that technology is both a fence that holds teachers back and a bridge to new horizons. Many teachers view technology as a threat, only by redefining the acceptable role for technology will allow teachers to be able to expand and venture forth into new territory. The technology will better allow teachers to focus on student needs.

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